



OFFICE MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 6, 2003

TO: Region Engineers
Region Delivery Engineers
TSC Managers
Resident/Project Engineers
Region Construction Engineers

FROM: Larry E. Tibbits
Chief Operations Officer

John Friend
Engineer of Delivery

SUBJECT: Bureau of Highway Instructional Memorandum 2003-02
Guidelines to Use Permanent Changeable Message Signs (CMS)
for AMBER Alert Messages

The AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Plan Program is a voluntary program through which emergency alerts are issued to notify the public about abductions of children. The FHWA recognizes the value of the AMBER Plan Program and fully supports the state and local governments' choice to implement this program. These child abduction alerts may be communicated through various means including radio and television stations, highway advisory radio, changeable message signs, and other media. The purpose of this instruction memorandum is to define procedures and circumstances for using CMS to display child abduction messages as part of an AMBER Alert Program and to define the format of the messages to be displayed. Named after Amber Hagerman, a six (6) year old abducted and murdered in 1996 in Arlington, Texas, this system is up and running in 43 other states and is accredited in the recovery of 21 children.

Two legislative bills were enacted in December of 2002 and fully support the AMBER Alert efforts. PA 712 of 2002 requires the Michigan State Police (MSP) to establish and maintain an AMBER Alert plan. PA 713 of 2002 allows radio and TV stations to broadcast AMBER Alert information as it is received from the MSP.

MDOT's Engineering Operations Committee has adopted the attached guidelines whenever a verifiable abduction of a child has occurred. These guidelines were developed with the full cooperation of the MSP.

The attached guideline identifies MDOT's position regarding the utilization of the permanent CMS to assist in the apprehension of the abductor and return of the child.

Currently these CMS are generally installed in the Grand and Metro Regions, but usage could expand to other regions.

Questions concerning this instructional memorandum should be directed Jim Schultz, Michigan Intelligent Transportation System Center at 313-256-9800 or schultzj3@michigan.gov.

Chief Operations Officer

Engineer of Delivery

BOH:MET:ES/JS:kab

Subject Index: Public Information

Attachment

cc:	C & T Support Area Staff	T. Fudaly, FHWA
	Real Estate Support Area, M. DeLong	MRBA
	Design Support Area, M. VanPortfleet	MAPA
	Maintenance Support Area, C. Roberts	MCPA
	Traffic & Safety Support Area, J. Culp	MCA
	C & T Support Area, B. O'Brien	MAA
	T. Anderson	AUC
	OEO - S. El Ahmad	CRAM
	C. Rademacher	MRPA
	V. Blaxton	ACEC
	G. Moore	MPA
	K. Reincke	

Guidelines for
Use of Permanent Changeable Message Signs (CMS) for Child Abduction
AMBER Alert Messages

MDOT Mission:

A primary mission of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is the safe and orderly movement of traffic. It is the policy of MDOT to display only real-time information that conveys current traffic safety and congestion information on Permanent Changeable Message Signs (Permanent CMS). An exception to MDOT policy on the use of Permanent CMS's will be made only for AMBER Alerts.

MSP AMBER Alert Request:

Only credible real-time information, where it is crucial to the safety of the victim to disseminate the information to the public in the near term, will be displayed on these Permanent CMS's. Michigan State Police (MSP) headquarters in Lansing will activate an AMBER Alert when circumstances meet the following criteria: the missing child is 17 years old or younger; the requesting law enforcement agency believes the child has been kidnaped; the vehicle description is known with a licence plate number and the agency believes the missing child is under threat of serious bodily harm or death.

The MSP will verify the abduction prior to requesting any Permanent CMS activations.

MDOT AMBER Alert Response:

MDOT will only respond to AMBER Alert requests from the MSP headquarters. MDOT Michigan Intelligent Transportation Systems (MITS) Center staff and MSP Prevention Services Section (PSS) staff shall jointly agree upon the most appropriate CMS message content. MITS Center staff shall also consult with MSP-PSS staff regarding the length of time to display messages (initially 2-3 hours), and extent of roadway system to display the messages (i.e. radius and/or directions and specific routes).

The length of time for a message will not exceed three hours. Canceled AMBER Alert messages will not exceed one hour.

CMS will only be activated in Southeastern Michigan when a AMBER Alert is for the South Eastern portion of Michigan and Washtenaw/Lenawee county areas.

MITS Center personnel will discuss with the MSP the limitations on message content, the number of signs that can be deployed within a given time period, conflicts with other necessary sign messages etc.

CMS messages will only be activated when there is very specific suspect vehicle information in the AMBER Alert. Including, but not limited to a vehicle plate number, make, model, color, approximate year or distinguishing vehicle characteristics.

AMBER Alert activation's with CMS's will not preempt safety related transportation messages, including lane closures, severe weather or hazardous driving conditions, detours, etc. Messages of this nature are of the highest priority and will supercede AMBER Alert messages.

AMBER Alert messages will be discontinued if the message creates an adverse traffic impact such as queues, markedly slower traffic, etc.

MITC Center staff will notify the MDOT Office of Communications when an AMBER Alert is requested. A joint debriefing of MDOT and MSP personnel shall follow every event.

In all cases, messages shall maintain the credibility of the CMS system. Possible message samples follow:

AMBER Alert CMS Notification Format (max 3 lines of 20 characters each):

- 1) "AMBER Alert"
- 2) "Dial 911"
- 3) Vehicle description, including but not limited to vehicle plate, make, model, color, approximate year, or distinguishing vehicle characteristics

AMBER Alert CMS Cancel Format (max 3 lines of 20 characters each):

- 4) "Cancel Amber Alert"
- 5) -blank-
- 6) -blank-

Questions regarding an AMBER Alert message can be directed to the MSP Prevention Services Section 517-333-4017